Response to Questions Submitted as of March 17, 2014

Intermediate Funders to Provide Operational, Programmatic, and Fiscal Agent Services to Pipeline to Proposal Awardees

Posted March 25, 2014; Amended March 28, 2014

Submitting the Proposal

Q1: How and where do we submit our proposal? The RFQ provides this email address for questions but not final proposals.
A1: Applicants can submit their quotes to rfq@pcori.org. Alternatively, quotes may be submitted using the “Apply” button on this webpage.1

Q2: Can RFPs be submitted electronically? If not, how many hard copies do you want sent to you? Please provide guidance as to where the proposal should be submitted either by mail or electronically.
A2: We ask that applicants submit quotes electronically. See A1 above.

Q3: Can applicants submit letters of support in addition to the Past Performance contacts provided in Appendix B?
A3: Yes. Applicants can provide letters of support in addition to Past Performance contacts.

Q4: There is a requirement that text be Arial or Times New Roman, no less than 11 points. Graphics and tables are acceptable. Do graphics and tables also need to abide by the font requirements (Arial or Times New Roman, no less than 11 points)?
A4: Yes. The font requirements apply to any graphics and tables.

1 Available at pcori.org/funding-opportunities/other-contract-research/pipeline-to-proposal-awards-initiative
Proposal Numbers and Timeline

Q5: Will all three tiers be launched in all regions?
A5: Yes. All tiers will be launched in all regions.

Q6: Will there be one set of 75 Pipeline Awards over two years, or two different cohorts in each year?
A3: We anticipate that there will be multiple cohorts over the two years. The distribution of awards is described in A7 below.

Q7: Can you confirm that the IF will not handle more than 40 contracts in a single year (40 in 2014, 35 in 2015)? Or might the 2014 grantees continue into 2015? (That clearly affects the IF’s staffing capacity in 2015.)
A7: Under this funding call, we do not expect Intermediate Funders (IFs) to manage more than 40 contracts at any time. The distribution of awards per IF in 2014 is expected to be up to:
- 20 Tier I awardees
- 10 Tier II awardees
- 10 Tier III awardees.
The distribution per IF in 2015 is expected to be up to:
- 10 Tier I awardees
- 15 Tier II awardees
- 10 Tier III awardees.

Q8: Are the dates for the calls for proposals set and will the Tiers be on different schedules? (e.g., T1 in the fall, T2 and T3 in the spring?)
A8: The dates for calls for proposals are set, and the tiers will be on different schedules. In 2014, a call for Tier I proposals is scheduled for spring, and calls for Tiers II and III proposals are scheduled for summer. In 2015, a call for Tier I proposals is scheduled for winter, a call for Tier II proposals is scheduled for spring, and a call for Tier III proposals is scheduled for summer.

Q9: What does PCORI’s timeline of activities look like and what is the primary focus in each year (or months) of funding?
A9: For the timeline, see A8 above. For information on the focus, see this webpage.2

National and Regional Intermediate Funders

Q10: Does an IF need to be located in a region to be the IF for that region?
A10: Yes. The goal is to extend the reach of PCOR across the country by tapping into the regional knowledge and expansive networks of organizations experienced in local, regional, and national health advocacy. It is our expectation that IFs will have ties to their communities and interact with patients and stakeholders at the grassroots level and with organizations within their region.

Q11: Please explain the role between the national IF and the regional IFs?
A11: Both national and regional IFs assist in the administration and management of the Pipeline to Proposal Awards. Regional IFs administer and manage awards within their specific census region. The national IF will administer and manage awards for which the project work crosses census regions.

2 Available at pcori.org/funding-opportunities/other-contract-research/pipeline-to-proposal-awards-initiative
Q12: For the National in Scope IF, will the IF support up to 75 grantees as well – in addition to supporting the e-communities?
A12: The national IF will support the same number of grantees as the regional IFs.

Q13: For the National in Scope IF, what is meant by web-based and e-communities? Will the IF that is national in scope support an e-community for the entire cohort of grantees across all 5 IFs?
A13: The national IF may choose to support awardees that are web-based or e-communities, as well as awardees located across more than one region. The national IF will not support an e-community across other IFs.

Q14: Can institutions work collectively to cover a region?
A14: Yes. Institutions can work collectively to cover a region, as long as there is a lead organization responsible for ensuring completion of deliverables.

Intermediate Funders Management Activities

Q15: What are the most important success factors PCORI will be looking for as IFs progress through the various Tiers and Cycles of awards?
A15: Among the most important success factors for the Pipeline to Proposal Initiative is capacity building and strengthening relationships between researchers, patients, and stakeholders, particularly in communities that have historically been underrepresented in research.

Q16: Will IFs be required to provide technical infrastructure for RPF submission and review processes?
A16: IFs will work with PCORI to issue the call for Pipeline to Proposal Awards, review Letters of Intent, and review applications according to PCORI review criteria. PCORI will make all final award decisions.

Q17: Once grantees are selected, will PCORI staff negotiate deliverables and other contract terms with grantees, or is the expectation that the IF would carry this out?
A17: IFs are expected to negotiate and execute contracts with awardees. We recommend that in their cost proposals, prospective IFs consider any costs (e.g., staff time or consultant and legal fees) involved in contracting.

Q18: Is there a common online grant management system that all five Intermediate Funders will use to track grantee details, receipt of reports, etc.
A18: The pilot IF, Colorado Foundation for Public Health and the Environment, is using Formsite to host the online application submission system and the awardee reporting and evaluation platform. To ensure consistency across regions, we ask that all IFs use this system.

Q19: We have heard that IFs may be required to use the contract management system that the pilot IF is using. Can you confirm that, and if so, could you provide more detail about that system’s functionality?
A19: See A18 above.
Q20: Under Project Requirements, Function 1: Operational and Programmatic Services Scope of Work, page 1 - The 2nd bullet in the right column describes PCORI’s training modules. Can you describe the training module format? Do IFs have the ability to augment PCORI training? Are the PCORI training modules Section 508 Compliant or will the IF need to provide this capability?
A20: PCORI is using an electronic Learning Management System (LMS), which will allow awardees to keep a record of their training. This LMS will be Section 508 compliant. IFs can provide additional training and technical assistance to awardees as needed and approved by PCORI.

Q21: Under Project Requirements, Function 1: Operational and Programmatic Services Scope of Work, page 1 - The 3rd Bullet in the left column that carries over to Page 2 states “Facilitates the Pipeline to Proposal awardees’ engagement in online circles to share findings, engagement models, lessons learned, trainings, and culture change strategies with awardees in the same tier across all fives IFs.” This sounds like an online system, is this correct? If it is online, are there any technology requirements we should be aware of?
A21: IFs can use various modalities to facilitate communication within and across tiers and regions. Modalities include webinars, video-conferencing, list-servs, message boards, and other social media tools.

Q22: Under the programmatic work, you refer to providing evaluations. For these small awards, what kind of evaluations are you suggesting? Can you be more specific about whether the IFs would be required to conduct separate evaluations for each site, or were you referring to an overall evaluation of the entire cohort? As you know, rigorous evaluations can be expensive and time-consuming to conduct. Conducting 75 of them could be an expensive and labor-intensive proposition.
A22: IFs are expected to work with PCORI, using PCORI’s evaluation framework and tools, to evaluate the Pipeline to Proposal Awards to inform internal process improvement and to collect supporting evidence for the concept of providing small awards to promote PCOR through the development of partnerships among researchers, patients, clinicians, and other stakeholders. IFs will not be expected to develop evaluation instruments and independently conduct evaluations of the awards.

Q23: You mentioned strategic planning technical assistance. Can you expand on your expectations here? Did you imagine the IF actually conducting strategic plans for awardees, or alternatively providing technical assistance on their approach to strategic planning? Conducting strategic plans would imply a much more costly approach.
A23: It is expected that IFs will provide technical assistance to awardees as requested throughout their strategic planning process.

Q24: Table 1: Key Deliverables… 3rd box under Deliverable: “refinement through workshops, meetings, and other” What should follow after the words “and other”? It appears something was cut off.
A24: The word outreach was omitted. The full sentence is as follows: “Plan for providing technical assistance to approximately 5 Tier II awardees based on experience with successful small award management, including enhancement of governance structure through the creation of a Board or advisory panel and strategic plan and policies, strengthening of infrastructure, and communications strategy for community development and topic refinement through workshops, meetings, and other outreach.”
Q25: Per the RFQ, we’d be expected to have to have operating hours of 8:30-5:30 for the people in question (p10). Administrative office hours typically operate between 9-5. Is this a hard and fast rule?
A25: It is expected that IFs will hold regular office hours and be available to provide technical assistance to awardees during regular office hours. Administrative office hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. are acceptable.

Q26: Does PCORI have a conflict of interest statement that outlines roles for the Intermediate Funder regarding the grant solicitation process and potential conflicts that might be associated with the Intermediate Funder’s partners that might wish to apply for PCORI grants?
A26: Yes. PCORI does have a Conflict of Interest form that IFs will have to sign upon being awarded a contract.

Travel and Site Visits

Q27: Please provide more information about travel expectations, if possible, since we do not know how long the national meeting will be, nor where it will be located. Is there a set amount you recommend being budgeted for this meeting? Should only one staff person plan on attending, or all key staff?
A27: We anticipate that PCORI will cover these costs directly.

Q28: For budgeting purposes, can you tell us how many days you expect the Pipeline to Proposals conference to be and where it will take place (if known)?
A28: We anticipate conducting a one-day IF orientation in mid-June 2014. Additionally, in 2015, we plan to hold two one-day conferences with all IFs, and two separate awardee conferences. We anticipate that PCORI will cover these costs directly.

Q29: The 2nd bullet in the left column on Page 2 states, “IFs should include these costs in their travel budgets.” How many days should we plan for? Should we assume Washington, DC as the destination? Do you have any other travel “cost” guidance?
A29: See A28 above.

Q30: Will site visits to all awardee sites be required? It appears that much of the work can be done remotely?
A30: Because much of the monitoring and technical assistance can be done remotely, site visits are not required.

Costs, Expenses, and Payments

Q31: Is the IF expected to monitor the documentation of all reported expenses (e.g., review of payroll records, OTPS invoices and cancelled checks)?
A31: Yes. IFs are expected to monitor the documentation of all reported expenses.

Q32: Will we have to front money or will we be able to bill PCORI before sending payments out to the awardees?
A32: IFs can invoice PCORI before sending payments to awardees.

Q33: Expense reimbursement submission - is this expected to be electronic as well?
A33: Yes. It is our expectation that IFs will submit their invoices electronically.
Q34: Can you provide more guidance around the payment terms? Were you imagining payouts being about 1-3 installments/year or at different intervals?
A34: IFs can invoice PCORI as often as monthly. Because the awards are on a cost-reimbursable basis, IFs can include project expenses in the monthly invoices.

Q35: On page 7, does "a file for upload with the expense data transmitted to PCORI entail? Assuming it is just a data file exported from the accounting software - is this correct?
A35: A file upload refers to a monthly invoice that is submitted to PCORI. This file should include supporting documentation (e.g., receipts as necessary, time and attendance records, invoices from consultants).

Q36: How committed is PCORI to the grantee payment system described in the RFQ? Given the small size of the grants, would PCORI consider paying grantees on the basis of achievement of contractual deliverables rather than actual expenditures? Or providing advances to be reconciled against documented spending? How committed is PCORI to having the IF preapprove purchases that are included in a budget that has already been approved?
A36: This is a cost-reimbursement contract. The IF is expected to submit invoices electronically as described in A35 above.

Q37: The RFQ indicates that funding will be provided on a cost reimbursement basis. What sort of support documentation will PCORI require for reimbursement for incurred costs?
A37: See A35 above.

Q38: No comingling of funds will be permitted." Does that mean we would need to have a dedicated bank account, or would identifying separate general ledger accounts suffice to distinguish funds?
A38: PCORI will set up a zero-balance checking account for each IF. The IF will use an on-line banking interface with Bank of America to request funding from PCORI. The IF will input the required vendor payments and/or the related fees due to the IF, and, once the expenses are approved for payment by PCORI, automated clearing house (ACH) payments will be disbursed directly to the primary bank accounts of the IF and the vendors.

Q39: What is included in administrative costs?
A39: Administrative costs refer to the cost of managing awardees and include personnel, consultant, and other direct costs.

Q40: This program is heavy on pass through dollars which will provide some institutional funding in fixed fees, however the scope of this program will require additional technical support that cannot be covered through many organization’s typical fixed fee rates. Can other program costs be requested? If so, what types of program costs are allowed?
A40: Yes. Other program costs can be requested to carry out the scope of the program. In your quote, you can include such costs as:
- personnel costs to carry out the management of the awards and provide technical assistance
- direct fees, including contractor fees such as additional costs for contract negotiations
- telephone and telecommunications
- supplies.
Q41: Are indirect expenses allowable, and is there a cap?
A41: For organizations with a federally negotiated indirect cost rate or an indirect rate calculation that has been verified by an independent certified public accountant, indirect costs are permissible expenses. These projects are largely administrative in nature and do not utilize the full research infrastructure that is allocated in a Facilities and Administrative or other negotiated indirect rate, so the rate would be capped at the administrative portion. Organizations without a federally negotiated indirect cost rate or a rate determined through independently audited financial statements are limited to a 10 percent indirect cost rate based on substantiated indirect costs.

Q42: Beyond regular overhead costs (personnel and other directs; indirect), is it allowable to build a margin for profit into the administrative fee? If so, does PCORI have an acceptable mark up on direct costs?
A42: These awards are cost reimbursable, and they are largely administrative in nature and do not utilize the full research infrastructure that is allocated in a Facilities and Administrative or other negotiated indirect rate. The Intermediate Funder will be reimbursed for direct salaries and wages with a detailed labor distribution report, negotiated or actual fringe benefits, and any other direct costs incurred, plus an administrative fee that is capped at 10 percent of total direct costs.